

Examining the Experience of Choosing a Major among First-Year, Undecided, First-Generation Undergraduates at the University of Dayton

Adam Solomon

Advisor: Savio D. Franco, Ph.D.



Abstract

Undecided students and first-generation students represent two populations who are at the greatest risk of attrition. Since the 1980s, both populations of students have increasingly become the focus of study in the retention literature, and yet little has been written about the intersection of these two student characteristics. This qualitative, phenomenological study attempts to address this intersectionality by highlighting the experience of decision-making around choice of major among first-year, first-generation, undecided undergraduates at the University of Dayton.

Methodology

Qualitative Phenomenology

Sampling

- Criterion: those enrolled in ASI 160 – First-Year Seminar for Discover Arts & Sciences and who are first-generation college students ($n = 35$)

Data Collection

- Individual Interviews w/ 4 Students

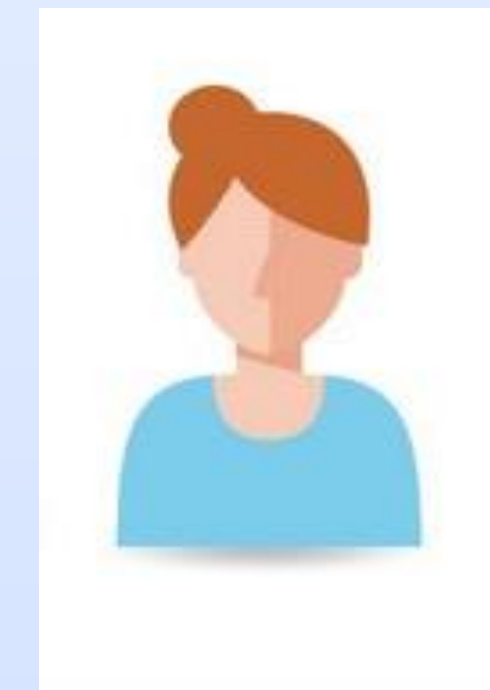
Data Analysis

- Transcripts were coded into themes, textural descriptions of participants' experiences, structural descriptions of participants' experiences, and a statement of essences that encompasses the participants' shared experience

Four Portraits: A Balancing Act



Luis



Kate

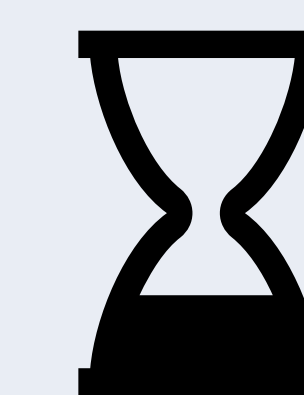


Sonya

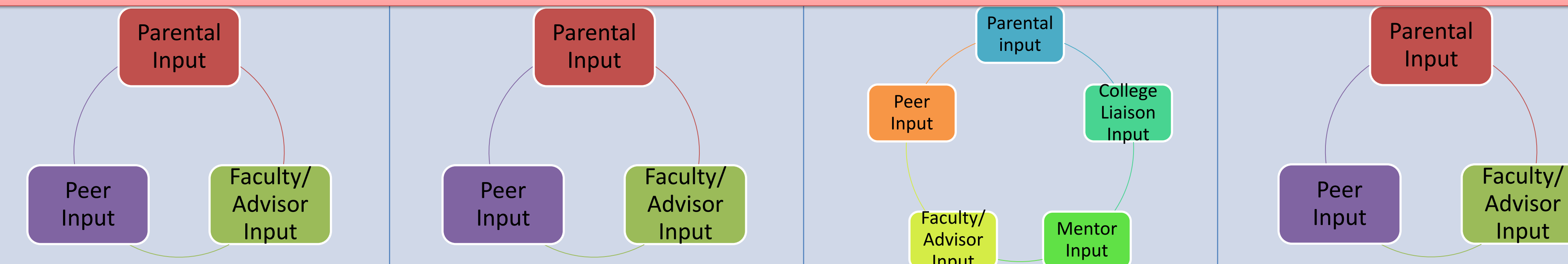


Madison

Temporal



Relational



Identity

Learning, Adapting, Guiding & Seeking Guidance

Intrinsic

- ★ Interest
- ★ Enjoyment
- ★ Satisfaction
- ★ Autonomy
- ★ Meaning

Extrinsic

- ★ Rewards
- ★ Pressure to Perform
- ★ Competition
- ★ Compliance
- ★ Ego Involvement

Conclusion

- Participants engaged in a balancing act while deciding on a major.
- Equipped with the belief that they should obtain a degree in four years and then start a career in the same field as their major.
- Each student factored time-to-degree completion, familial pressure to consider money and personal interests into their decision-making around academic major.
- Participants affirmed the *cultural purgatory* phenomenon present in the literature (Longwell-Grice et al., 2016).

Future Directions

- Quantitative, Mixed Methods, Group Comparison Methodologies
- Encourage Academic & Social Involvement
- Targeted Orientation

Select References

- Cuseo, J. (2005). "Decided," "undecided," and "in transition": Implications for academic advisement, career counseling and student retention. In Feldman, R. S. (Ed.). *Improving the first year of college: Research and practice*. (pp. 27-48). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Ishitani, T. T. (2006). Studying attrition and degree completion behavior among first-generation college students in the United States. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 77(5), 861-885.
- Longwell-Grice, R., Adsit, N. Z., Mullins, K., & Serrata, W. (2016). The first ones: Three studies on first-generation college students. *NACADA Journal*, 36(2), 34-46.